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TAGS: PGOV KDEM TO UV

SUBJECT: TOGO: UFC HOLDS 2ND PARTY CONGRESS, CHOOSES
PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE FOR 2010 ELECTIONS

REF: A. LOME 263

1B. LOME 337

1C. LOME 360

Classified By: Political Officer Susan Walke for Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

11. (C) Summary. The Union of the Forces of Change (UFC), the largest opposition party in Togo, held its 2nd party Congress on July 18-19 in Lome, Togo. The party released a number of resolutions concerning the political way forward and chose its candidate for the 2010 presidential elections. Aside from a highly-publicized tiff with Action Committee for Change (CAR) president Yaovi Agboyibo and disagreement within the youth wing of the UFC, the congress was a success. In a subsequent meeting, UFC president Gilchrist Olympio expanded upon his vision of the way ahead, but with considerable frustration as to how obstacles remain in his own path to be elected head of state. The party faces difficulties unless constitutional and institutional reforms are made and the process of reconciliation is furthered. End Summary.

12. (SBU) General. The theme of the UFC party congress was "Realizing true change in Togo with a UFC candidate." The opening ceremony included speakers from several small parties allied with the UFC. All major diplomatic missions were represented at the opening, and France, China, and the U.S. at the closing. (Note. The Chinese told a diplomatic colleague afterward that their attendance at a political party meeting was a breakthrough for them; they had never gone to one before. End Note). Sessions were well attended and went very late into the night. Even state television gave good coverage to the opening once it finished showing the wrestling that President Faure was watching up north. The state press summarized the closing, and the private press gave the results far more attention. The Gendarmerie provided Olympio good security protection.

13. (U) Leadership. At the conclusion of the congress, the new governing board of the UFC was announced. Gilchrist Olympio was re-elected as the president of the party and also chosen to be the party's presidential candidate in 2010. Jean-Pierre Fabre continues as the Secretary General, and Patrick Lawson is now 1st Vice-President instead of 3rd.

14. (U) Issues. Olympio struck a responsive chord in his opening speech when he observed that after 40 years of independence, 80 percent of the population lives below the poverty line. He added that the situation has worsened with the "dizzying" increase in prices of daily necessities and cement and called for a number of urgent actions to be taken. The party congress adopted some sixteen resolutions and issued statements on social issues, specifically the security of the population, political prisoners, alleviating the food crisis, cleaning up corruption, and ending the suffering of the Togolese people. It did not always offer ideas as to how to resolve the problems. One resolution requested that implementation of the Global Political Agreement (GPA) continue, asking specifically that Burkinabe President Blaise Compaore help with political reforms and requesting greater opposition participation in the Truth, Justice, and Reconciliation process. Several resolutions discussed the upcoming elections and security concerns and requested international community assistance.

¶ 15. (C) Disconnects. Two minor glitches dogged the congress. The UFC publicized the fact that it had invited CAR President (and former Prime Minister) Agboyibo to attend the congress, hinting that it was a done deal. That would have meant that the country's third most important party, and its other best known opposition figure, were tacitly aligned with the UFC. When we met with Agboyibo last week, he said angrily that he would not be attending due to an insult he received from Olympio. Agboyibo complained that the UFC wants the opposition to unite as long as the UFC takes the lead role, a position his party will not support. This turn of events was a surprise, as Fabre indicated a few months ago that relations between the parties had vastly improved (reftel A). The second incident involved the youth movement within the UFC, which rose up in opposition against the person the leadership was foisting on it as national secretary for youth and actually took over the party congress for a time. The leadership finally agreed to give its candidate a provisional appointment, with new youth bodies to be elected in all prefectures, and they in turn to elect a new representative. We encountered some bad feelings about party democracy after that incident.

¶ 16. (C) Meeting with Olympio. Ambassador and PolOff called on the UFC President at his residence July 22. We were joined by Fabre, Lawson, and eventually the Nigerian Ambassador to Togo, among others. Olympio detailed the many reasons he is not technically eligible to run for president and lamented the lack of clarity pertaining to the rules. He is currently not qualified to run based on residency requirements, the fact that he holds dual citizenship and claims not to know how to legally give up his French citizenship, and age limits. These limitations were added during 2003 constitutional changes. We told him that ruling party heavies assured us that President Faure intends to turn a blind eye at these restrictions but Olympio noted, rightly, that it is the Constitutional Court and not Faure which ends up ruling on such issues. President Olympio did suggest he would feel better if Faure would state in writing that he will disregard these legal issues.

¶ 17. (U) "Victimization." Olympio continues to characterize his party as solely a victim. He stated that he has gone along with many "unfair proposals" just to ensure that the democratization process continues to move forward. The UFC President noted several times that both the ruling Rally of the Togolese people (RPT) and the UFC received roughly 900,000 votes in the October 2007 legislative elections, yet the RPT has 50 seats and the UFC only 27 due to unfair districting. According to Olympio, while his party realized the inequity of the ratio, it did not want to stop the process and thus allowed it to move forward. He also stated that while he was consulted as to who would be appropriate as a facilitator for the GPA, none of his suggestions were chosen, and Blaise Compaore was dropped upon him. While he does not have a problem with Compaore as the facilitator, he is worried that the process is not continuing to advance, and that Compaore has become tired of the entire business and believes that Togo is a minor issue (for him). In both meetings led by Compaore in which the UFC representatives are vastly outnumbered by others of lesser importance, and in other actions liked to the GPA, Olympio feels as if the UFC continues to give in with little gain.

¶ 18. (C) Comment. The theme of change is an obvious choice given the dictatorial history of Togo. However, the results of the UFC party congress give little indication as to how the UFC would govern, if elected. While criticism of the government abounds, the UFC does not offer any alternate solutions. We were seeking to obtain from Olympio an idea as to how he intends to proceed over the next two years. Instead, he has again now left the country, to return who knows when. Perhaps most importantly, Olympio continues to see himself personally as the target of the machinations of the ruling establishment and focuses on little else, rather than carefully considering his role and what is best overall for the party. Some within the party appear disgruntled with his continued leadership. Indeed, the new slate of officers

was literally handed down to the Congress from Olympio and his close associates, with the delegates given no chance to vote. There is ongoing speculation that either Lawson or the more dynamic UFC Secretary General, Jean-Pierre Fabre (chairman of the UFC parliamentarians) wants to take Olympio's place. The youth revolt was an interesting phenomenon at the congress, since the party has been and continues to be run by the same older generation of men, the majority of whom are from southern Togo. While some new women and a younger person or two have now been added to the UFC leadership, the overall image does not seem to be terribly different

¶9. (C) Comment continued. The UFC President looked tired, especially at the opening of the session, which some thought was stress. As observers are pointing out, if elected in 2010 he will be 74 years old, not necessarily an element in his favor. Olympio understands the hurdles he faces in standing for the 2010 elections. While Faure said he will make sure Olympio is allowed to stand in the elections (ref B), this cannot be a unilateral decision. Unless constitutional reforms are made, Olympio's candidacy is probably illegal. Faure may not have the political capital to push through the needed changes due to opposition from the old guard of the RPT, and deeming unilaterally Olympio's candidacy legal goes against Faure's efforts to improve governance and adherence to the rule of law.

¶10. (C) Comment continued. Nigeria. The Nigerian visit that occurred during our meeting was quite odd. Ambassador Baba Zanna clearly had an agenda. While inquiring about the reform process, he asked Olympio if there is a specific reason why Compaore should continue to facilitate. The Nigerian asked Olympio what he thought of former President Obasanjo, to which the Togolese gave an ambiguous reply. Since Obasanjo had just come to see Faure (ref C), we had to wonder whether the Nigerians might have a Plan B afoot and excused ourselves -- to the Nigerian's obvious relief -- so the two could continue talking.

TWINING